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DAWN

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Opposition senators decry 'election fraud, overreach'

- PTI seeks parliamentary probe into institutions exceeding authority
- Govt accuses opposition party of perpetrating 'economic terrorism'

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Barbs flew in the Senate on Friday as the opposition slammed government policies and demanded a parliamentary probe into "institutional overreach" and "election fraud", as the government accused the PTI of committing "economic terrorism" while also chiding it for the Results Transmission System (RTS) fiasco in the 2018 general polls.

Speaking on a calling-attention notice, PTI parliamentary leader in the House Barrister Syed Ali Zafar said parliament had been made irrelevant and meaningless. His speech was interrupted several times by the members of the treasury benches, who loudly objected to his remarks.

"Matters pertaining to the country's economy, security and foreign policy are not brought before parliament; [instead], decisions are taken in drawing rooms," he said, regretting that even agreements linked to the country's future were signed while keeping parliament in the dark.

"This is a betrayal of the constitutional concept of civilian supremacy," he asserted. Noting that all the lawmakers were under oath to protect the Constitution, he called for regaining lost civilian space.

"Will this Senate remain a rubber stamp or will it rise to face the storm? Let us ensure that the law is not merely the law of the powerful but the law of the land," he remarked.

Barrister Zafar said that a full-blown constitutional crisis had occurred after the Feb 8, 2024, general election, claiming that despite the citizens giving a "clear decision" on election day, an "attack" was carried out on democracy.

"The people's mandate was not only ignored but was systematically destroyed through violence and manipulation," he said, adding that this struck at the heart of democracy itself.

He said he was raising the matter beyond partisan interest, describing it as an issue of national concern. He claimed that a government installed without a credible mandate lacked moral authority and was therefore unable to take difficult decisions or lead the country through crises.

Turning to the economy, he said the public was facing an "economic slaughter", describing inflation as a "sword hanging over the head of every citizen" and warning that rising public debt would burden future generations with "shackles of slavery".

He claimed public debt had reached Rs80 trillion and questioned what he called the government's lack of a coherent strategy on exports, job creation, information technology and support for small and medium enterprises.

"What is their plan? Is the plan only to tax those who are already burdened with taxes?" he asked. "This government doesn't have a policy or governance … only drift, confusion and the dark clouds of an approaching storm."

Expressing concern over the ongoing brain drain, he said the best minds in the country were leaving because they saw no hope, no justice and no future. He also claimed industries were relocating, production was decreasing and investment was fleeing the country. He also alleged that laws were being "weaponised", claiming cases were being "manufactured" for political victimisation and that prolonged litigation itself had become a form of punishment.

Such trends were eroding public trust and hurting Pakistan's foreign policy, he said, alleging that the country lacked clarity on key international issues. "We have abandoned our principled stance on Kashmir," he claimed, pointing out that Pakistan did not have a clear position on Venezuela or Iran. He said that a new world order was emerging and in the face of this new reality, every nation needed to defend its sovereignty and its "strategic autonomy".

Barrister Zafar also demanded that a special parliamentary committee be constituted to investigate the serious allegations of election fraud and "institutional overreach".

'Economic terrorism'

Responding to Barrister Zafar's speech, Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani criticised the economic policies pursued by the PTI government between 2018 and 2022, saying repeated policy failures during that period brought the country to the brink of default.

He said the past PTI government changed four finance ministers, noting that while an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme was initially rejected, it was later accepted on weak terms and eventually sabotaged for political reasons.

Mr Kayani alleged that when the PTI-led government realised it was losing power, it deliberately undermined the IMF agreement despite being aware that such actions could push the country towards default.

He said the present government, after assuming office, took difficult but necessary decisions to revive the IMF programme, rebuild trust with international partners and avert sovereign default.

Despite resistance and repeated attempts to derail the process, he said, the government succeeded in stabilising the economy.

He said former ministers belonging to the PTI resorted to "economic terrorism" by writing letters to the IMF to derail the programme.

Documentary on tragic K2 climb wins praise at Sundance

Sadpara, Snorri's failed attempt during 2021 winter chronicled in *The Last First: Winter K2*

By Jamil Nagri

SAJID Ali Sadpara poses with producers Sean Richard (L) and Olive Faure at the Sundance premiere.—Dawn

GILGIT: The documentary film *The Last First: Winter K2*, which chronicles the tragic fate of legendary climbers Mohammad Ali Sadpara and John Snorri during their 2021 winter summit attempt of K2, gained international recognition at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival in the United States.

Directed by award-winning filmmaker Amir Bar-Lev, the documentary takes an unflinching look at one of the deadliest seasons on the world's second-highest peak and tells a harrowing story about the race to claim mountaineering's "last great prize".

The narrative focuses on the expedition where Snorri and the father-son team of Ali and Sajid Sadpara set out to be the first to summit K2 during winter when the mountain's conditions are the cruellest.

The race to summit resulted in many deaths during that season and exposed deep fault lines in alpinism today.

These include the pressures from commercialisation, the toxic effects of social media, and long-brewing tensions between those who have been marginalised and those who have historically basked in the sport's glory.

Sajid, who survived the incident and later participated in the search operation for his father's body, attended the premiere in Park City.

He shared his journey with the audience, detailing the strategy employed on K2 and the moment his father and Snorri went missing during their descent from the top of the peak.

Festival organisers said *The Last First* is a documentary about the immense dangers involved in climbing K2 in winter.

Bar-Lev, known for *The Tillman Story* and *Long Strange Trip*, tells a moving story that unpacks the changing culture of extreme mountain climbing.

"By January 2005, all the world's tallest mountains — the 14 peaks that stretch above 8,000 meters — had been summited in wintertime, the most dangerous time of year for climbing. All except for one, that is — K2, in the Himalayas of Pakistan," Bar-Lev said in an interview with Deadline.

"Becoming the first person to summit K2 in winter, thus, loomed as the last great unachieved feat in mountaineering — 'the last first,' as it were," Bar-Lev added.

The two legendary climbers set out on that mission. To their surprise, the climbers would soon be joined on the mountain by others aiming to eclipse them, including influencer climbers, film crews, and commercial expedition clients.

SC upholds tribunal order restoring sessions judge

Three-judge bench sets aside former SHC chief justice's petition

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday set aside a petition filed by the Sindh High Court's former chief justice against the decision of a judicial service tribunal that had ordered the reinstatement of a sessions judge.

A three-judge SC bench comprising Justice Shahid Waheed, Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan and Justice Shakeel Ahmed announced the verdict.

District and Sessions Judge Aijaz Ali Khaskheli, who joined the Sindh judicial service in 1996, was removed from office in 2016 by then SHC chief justice Sajjad Ali Shah who was later elevated to the Supreme Court and retired upon reaching superannuation in 2022.

The controversy stemmed from an appeal filed by the former SHC chief justice through the court registrar, seeking clarification on a point of law: whether a service tribunal could interfere with the lawful exercise of discretion by the competent authority, namely the chief justice of the high court, in awarding punishment.

Mr Khaskheli, who was serving as a judge of the accountability court in Hyderabad at the time, is the respondent in the appeal.

He was appointed as a civil judge in 1996 and promoted to the rank of district and sessions judge in 2014. In 2016, he was suspended and subsequently dismissed following disciplinary proceedings initiated by the then SHC chief justice on allegations of misconduct.

The former judicial officer later approached the Sindh Subordinate Judicial Service Tribunal, which had on Sept 30, 2024, ruled in his favour. The tribunal held that the disciplinary proceedings were procedurally flawed and that the penalty of dismissal was disproportionate to the alleged misconduct.

The tribunal also noted that the then chief justice, who was the complainant in the case, had acted as both the initiating and punishing authority, in violation of the principle of nemo judex in causa sua — that no one should be a judge in their own cause.

The dispute arose after the respondent judge issued what was termed an "unlawful notice" to the then Hyderabad commissioner, seeking his personal attendance. The notice alleged that funds for the construction of a compound wall of a bungalow occupied by the respondent judge had been withheld by the commissioner.

The commissioner approached the office of the SHC registrar, who brought the matter to the attention of the then chief justice. The respondent judge was subsequently dismissed from service.

After the service tribunal decided in favour of the respondent judge last year, the matter came before the Supreme Court. The SHC registrar argued that the tribunal's decision should be overturned, contending that it had erred in applying the law and that the dismissal was justified.

Conversely, the counsel for the respondent judge submitted that the disciplinary proceedings were fundamentally flawed as the SHC chief justice, who initiated the complaint, also acted as the punishing authority. This, he argued, violated the principles of natural justice.

The respondent further contended that the disciplinary proceedings were initiated without first repatriating him to his parent department, as required under the Sindh Civil Servants (E&D) Rules, 1973. It was also argued that he was removed without a regular departmental inquiry, which was mandatory under the relevant rules.

Pakistan, Somalia agree to boost security ties

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Somalia agreed on Friday to strengthen collaboration in training, border management, disaster management and the adoption of a joint strategy against terrorism to deepen cooperation in internal security.

The agreement was reached as Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met a high-level Somali delegation led by Somalia's Interior Minister Ali Yusuf at the Ministry of Interior.

During the meeting, Mr Naqvi announced visa facilitation for Somali citizens travelling to Pakistan for medical treatment and education.

Mr Naqvi assured his counterpart of Pakistan's full support to Somalia in policing and counterterrorism. He said Pakistan would extend complete cooperation to Somalia across multiple sectors.

Mr Yusuf said his country was "facing a difficult situation and was actively fighting terrorists". He expressed hope that the visit would expand bilateral relations between the two countries.

Mr Yusuf expressed a strong desire to benefit from Pakistan's experience, noting that Naqvi's initiatives for Islamabad's infrastructure development were commendable. Both ministers stressed the need for improved coordination to advance shared interests in various sectors.

The Somali interior minister formally invited Mr Naqvi to visit Somalia and delivered a special message from the prime minister of Somalia for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. —APP

Call for solidarity with legal activists following their arrest, remand

- Eight PBC members urge bar bodies to condemn 'persecution' of couple
- HRCP, National Party condemn arrests, demand their release

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Eight newly elected members of the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) on Friday called upon the council and the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) to unequivocally condemn the "malicious persecution" of human rights defenders and to protest in solidarity with Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and her husband, Advocate Hadi Ali Chattha.

"We call upon the Pakistan Bar Council, the Supreme Court Bar Association and all other lawyers' bodies to perform their duty and unequivocally condemn this malicious persecution of human-rights defenders and to vigorously protest and stand in solidarity with Imaan Mazari and Hadi Chattha before all forums," said the statement issued by the eight council members.

It was signed by Abid Shahid Zuberi, Shafqat Mehmood Chohan, Qazi Muhammad Arshad, Munir A. Khan Kakar, Salman Akram Raja, Salahuddin Ahmad, Abdus Sattar Khan and Muhammad Maqsood Buttar.

The statement came after an anti-terrorism court on Friday sent the couple to jail on judicial remand in a case relating to a protest outside the Islamabad High Court and the alleged manhandling of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association president.

The PBC members said they condemned the "mala fide" arrest of the couple. "We are absolutely clear this brave couple are being punished solely for the 'sins' of professionally representing victims of state oppression and speaking out against ongoing human rights abuses in Pakistan in order to set an example for others," the statement said.

"When senior military officers conduct press conferences against them, when journalists who portray themselves as being close to the intelligence establishment insist the decision has been made to teach this couple a lesson, when a farcical criminal case of terrorism is brought for the crime of publishing tweets … when fresh and backdated FIRs are conjured out of thin air on completely frivolous allegations to justify arrest … it is evident that the State has abandoned even any pretence to observe the rule of law," the statement regretted.

HRCP, NP condemn arrests

Separately, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) condemned what it said appeared to be the unlawful arrests and reported manhandling of Ms Mazari and Mr Chattha by Islamabad police.

In a statement, the HRCP said arresting lawyers in the presence of bar leadership and taking them to an undisclosed police station amounted to a grave abuse of authority and a violation of due process. It also criticised the use of "successive and fabricated FIRs" to harass and intimidate dissent, calling for an end to such practices.

Meanwhile, National Party Punjab also condemned the arrests, describing them as an assault on constitutional freedoms and democratic norms.

In a statement, it urged political parties, labour organisations and rights groups to unite in protest, warning that failure to resist such actions could shrink political space and lead to the targeting of activists "one by one". It demanded the immediate release of Ms Mazari and Mr Chattha, reiterating its commitment to civil liberties and the rule of law.

Tirah residents 'waiting in line' to be displaced

Inclement weather not the only hurdle, as authorities struggle to facilitate the smooth registration and movement of those who have left their homes

By Ibrahim Shinwari in Khyber

FAMILIES leaving Tirah Valley register themselves with authorities at the Sandana Centre in Upper Bara.—Photo by the writer

UNDER normal circumstances, the journey from Bagh Markaz in Tirah to Bara — on the outskirts of Peshawar — should take no more than three to four hours.

But ever since the authorities asked the people of Tirah to evacuate their homes — in preparation for an operation against terrorist elements who have infiltrated the area — this 110km route is taking several days to navigate.

Although the northern parts of the country are in the grip of a severe cold spell, bringing with it rain and snow, this is not all that is holding up traffic on Bara Road.

Families leaving the valley have to first register themselves with the authorities at Bara Markaz. From there, they must make their way to Dwa Thoye, where the road forks — with Peshawar in one direction and Afghanistan in the other. Here, they are supposed to be reimbursed for their transportation costs.

After completing this stage, evacuees must then trek to Paindi Cheena and Mandi Kas. Here, they are given mobile phone SIMs and the official grant promised to displaced households.

According to those who have been through this lengthy process, the hold-up and long queues at these points are massively delaying their journey — amid inclement weather — to the relative calmer climes of Bara, where most Tirah residents already have winter homes.

Unlike previous displacements carried out ahead of military action in these areas from 2008 to 2012, no camps have been set up for the internally displaced. This time, only those living in Tirah are being uprooted, and since most of the around 30,000 households in this area already have alternative lodgings near Peshawar, most are either staying at their own places, or with their extended families.

But as Nazir Jan explains, the 110km journey from Bagh Maidan to Bara was nothing short of a nightmare for his family. The majority of people left their homes in haste, and faced immense hardships during the long wait to register themselves.

Perhaps authorities did not anticipate the scale of the displacement that would come once military action was announced in the area. Although some families were reluctant to leave their homes, the sudden exodus from the valley has severely taxed authorities' ability to ensure the smooth registration of those leaving.

The bad weather hasn't made things any easier, forcing authorities to repeatedly change plans and locations of registration and biometric verification centers in order to control the unruly ever-restless crowds that gather at these points.

On a number of occasions, large groups of dissatisfied people have also blocked the roads and ransacked registration booths; since everyone wants their family to be registered as quickly as possible so they can move on towards their destinations, rather than wait in the open amid freezing temperatures.

As of Thursday, however, the evacuation of families from Tirah was fully suspended, and authorities focused instead on clearing the backlog of families still stranded on the roads.

Although the deadline for evacuating their areas was earlier set at Jan 25, the latest statement issued by Khyber House a day earlier said that the process of evacuation and registration would only restart after the weather improved.

Resistance

Residents of the restive Tirah Valley, which borders Afghanistan, have been holding out for quite some time. The authorities had demanded that they should either ask the militants to leave their area, take up arms against the intruders themselves, or simply leave their homes so the forces can move in to flush out the unwelcome visitors.

The outlaws refused to leave and the locals were reluctant to take up arms. It was a fait accompli; they eventually had to agree to pack up their belongings and reluctantly leave the picturesque valley for the third time since 2015.

The decision was not easy. Most of the inhabitants of Tirah had barely finished piecing their lives together, rebuilding their homes and lives after the last military operation.

Although the government came to their help, initiating projects to improve their lives, the respite was short-lived. In 2022, locals found armed men roaming freely in their fields and knocking at their doors, seeking "food and shelter".

"We got struck between the devil and the deep sea," Nazir Jan tells us while waiting in queue at the dusty Mandi Kas center to collect his transport fare.

The miscreants had already started asserting themselves by intensifying attacks on security forces, demanding tax on agriculture produce from poppy and hemp crops, while also establishing parallel courts in some localities.

In the words of Peer Mela resident Noor Habib, none of the nearly 20,000 families who reside in the valley were willing to leave their houses. But living there was becoming more and more difficult, as security forces and terrorists fought duels day after day.